

PUBLIC CAN'T VIEW CITY H.I.P. REPORTS

Officers Object—Two Years
of Inspections at Issue

By DAVID BIRD

For more than two years the city's Health Department has been sending inspectors into the Health Insurance Plan of Greater New York's centers to find out how well they are serving the plan's members, but the inspectors' reports cannot be seen by the members in general or by the public because of objections of H.I.P. officers.

Last year a few of the reports were made available to consumer groups who requested them, but that practice was stopped when the H.I.P. objected.

Since then the city, whose employees make up almost half of H.I.P.'s membership, has worked in its contracts with the plan for ways of making the reports public. However, the legal right to do so still is unclear. The Health Department has asked the Corporation Counsel to look into the matter after the agency's own lawyer said H.I.P. had the right to decide who could see the reports.

"The reports on the whole were favorable," said Allan Kornfeld, the president of H.I.P., "but they fell into the hands of professional consumers, some of whom do not have the best interests of H.I.P. at heart." Mr. Kornfeld did not name the groups.

760,000 in Health Plan

H.I.P. is the largest prepaid medical-insurance plan in the East, with 760,000 members. Medical service to members is provided through 28 centers in the metropolitan area. The centers are affiliated with the H.I.P. but are run privately by groups of physicians.

H.I.P. members are allowed to choose which center to affiliate with to receive their medical services. The city's inspections were an attempt to give a member some basis for judging the centers.

Asked how a member could decide which center to join without some kind of evaluation, Mr. Kornfeld said the situation was no different from that of a person trying to pick a private physician.

"There's no book that compares one doctor to another," he said.

The city's Health Department has inspected health facilities ranging from laboratories to hospitals, but Mr. Kornfeld said "the inspectors are not sophisticated in group practice." He described the inspectors as a group as "whiz kids whose personnel changes frequently."

At the Health Department, Al Schwars, the assistant commissioner in charge of evaluation and institutional review, said that the inspectors were well-qualified and that the reports needed to be made public to insure that members were aware when a group was giving less than adequate care.

"If the reports are not made public," Mr. Schwartz said, "they are worth very little."

Dr. Lowell Bellin, the Health Commissioner, said, "I personally would not be loath to sharing them."

No law says the city must inspect the H.I.P. centers. Harry Hollander, the Health Department's counsel, says H.I.P. has a right to decide who will see the reports.

"We did not go in as a matter of right," Mr. Hollander said, "but at the sufferance of the H.I.P."

Because of the different interpretations, the matter was referred to the Corporation Counsel's office for an opinion. A spokesman for the office said there was no indication when the opinion would be rendered.

Plan Started in '47

One of the inspection reports that did get out of the Health Department was for the H.I.P.'s Grand Concourse Medical group, which occupies space in the Royal Hospital, a 91-bed private, profit-making—or proprietary—hospital at 2021 Grand Concourse in the Bronx.

The Grand Concourse group is one of the original H.I.P. groups that began the plan's operations in 1947. With 44,000 members it is now one of the plan's larger centers.

After the inspection team visited Grand Concourse on May 10, 1973, it reported that the physicians seemed to spend too much time on patients other than the group members they were supposed to treat, that members had to wait in long lines in the cramped laboratory, that the X-ray service seemed to be more interested in outside paying clients and that an inordinate number of members were admitted to Royal Hospital rather than to the more

prestigious hospitals in the area, such as Bronx-Lebanon, Montefiore and Einstein.

Dr. Donald N. Logsdon, the H.I.P. medical director, replied that fewer than 10 percent of the patients were outside the group and that H.I.P. had been urging the group to loosen its ties to Royal Hospital but had been unsuccessful so far because "the group feels it's convenient to put routine cases there."

He conceded that the laboratory was cramped because no more space was available at the hospital. He said the inspectors got a mistaken impression of the X-ray operations "because the technician was irritated when they started badgering him when he was busy doing procedures."